THEATERS — MOTION PICTURES

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MUSIC — ART

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The Stage and Its People

Blanche Tonlin and Marion Green in "Monsieur Beaucaire".

June Walker in "My Lady Friends".

Pauline Armitage and Sydney Mason in "The Cat-Bird".

John Charles Thomas and Wilda Bennett in "Apple Blossoms"

Flo Lewis in "Tick-Tack-Toe".

Emily Stevens and O. P. Heggie in "Sophie".

Kathryn Perry in "The Ziegfeld Girls of 1920"

Winifred Hanley in "Abraham Lincoln"

As We Were Saying—

By Heywood Broun

IT HAS often been noted in our national game that a pitcher fails to be greatly effective when he tries to put too much on the ball. The man who uses nothing but sharp and bewildering curves and refuses on any occasion simply to lay the ball across the plate invariably weakens. Much as we dislike intruding the affairs of the diamond into the drama, we cannot resist the analogy, because both the plays produced during the week suffered from an excess of effort on the part of their authors.

There must be a stirring drama in the life of George Washington ready for the hand of anybody who will treat it with the same simplicity which marks the "Abraham Lincoln" of John Drinkwater. Mr. MacKaye has taken quite the opposite course. He has tried to give us a new Washington and in a new manner. Rebelling against the hampering conventions of the stage, he has invented a technique of his own, which is far more troublesome. He has peppered his play with ballads and various stunts, which trip up his narrative again and again. In fact, one can hardly avoid the impression that Mr. MacKaye was more interested in the trimmings than in the play itself. He has fairly worn himself out in trying to be different, but he achieves a difference which makes conventionality seem a much to be desired quality.

Washington presents more difficulties to the dramatist of to-day than Lincoln. Not only do we know less about him, but we know far more that isn't so. He has taken his place among the myths. And yet, though he possessed less of the highest common factor of all mankind than Lincoln, he was no attitudinising stick. He might have wrestled with Abe himself and perhaps have thrown him. Probably Washington was the most athletic of all our Presidents. Roosevelt knew more about boxing, to be sure, but even his skill might not have availed against the weight and height of Washington. He must have been almost as tall as Lincoln, and he was broader and faster on his feet. Still, there is no getting away from the fact that he was a country gentleman in an age in which entertaining was among the professions, and he can hardly have been as consistent in his training as Lincoln. It would have been a good match.

In looking back at Philip Moeller's "Sophie" we feel that our review of the play was not altogether just. The play does run down in fearful fashion, to be sure, but before the disintegration has set in there is much that is nimble. Mr. Moeller, however, has set high hurdles for himself. For an act or so he clears them beautifully. Often he has something to spare in his quick leaps, but by and by there is less spring in his fancy. At such times it is advisable for a playwright to adopt the prudent even though ignominious expedient of crawling under the hurdle or walking around it. Moeller is more daring and less wise. He approaches each barrier boldly, and up he goes, often to come down on the side of his head, on his neck or flat on his back. When he began "Sophie" he set himself the task of being brilliant for three acts. It should be counted in his favor that for the greater part of an act he holds up to almost the best standards of artificial comedy. The meeting of Sophie and Dorval is delightfully done. Thereafter the wit comes back only in occasional flashes. It is not sustained.

Of course, artificial comedy is one of the most difficult forms of the theater. The playwright must be tireless in his capacity to coax wit out of the unconscious or he must palm his lesser lines most cleverly to make them seem genuine. Moeller does not palm well. When his wit is not of the first class it is quite easily recognized as fourth or fifth class. In fact some scenes of the play are nothing but echoes of our own modern comedy of bad manners done in costume.

Not only did Moeller burden himself with the obligation to be consistently witty, but there is also an implied promise from early in the evening that he will be consistently naughty. Here again the task is enormous. Early in the evening, when the first nighters are fresh from their homes and firesides, when they have just put the children to sleep and told grandmother not to sit up, it is comparatively easy to shock them. Practically anything about a bed or a bedroom or a nightgown will do, particularly if it is said in French. Then as the evening wears on, the audience which is under the constant assault of a daring author becomes more and more brazen and sophisticated. Lines which would have been hair raising early in the evening receive not so much as a giggle. The innocence of eight-thirty has disappeared by nine-thirty and the author must face the fact that he is dealing with men and women of the world. By ten everybody in the house has mentally declared himself for open coverlets openly arrived at and by eleven any self-respecting author just has to pull down his curtain. By that time there is nothing left in his whole stock of stories, situations and suggestions which can possibly disturb or interest this shameless audience.

When everything unfavorable has been recorded about Mr. Moeller's play the fact still remains that a fine performance could save it. An actress who could bring an unflagging gayety to the part could lift it through the second act relapse. Miss Stevens, on the first night at any rate, was successful only in indicating a definite personality. It was not the right personality. It was neither light enough nor humorous enough. At points where Sophie was supposed to jab some foe with a rapier wit Miss Stevens swung the line over her head like a battle-ax. Her enunciation was indistinct, but not enough to conceal the fact that some of her pronunciation was fearful.

We hope that some day Mr. Moeller will desert the field of historical romance and select such a set of characters that some of them may be humdrum enough for him to give his wit a breathing spell now and again during the course of a performance.

Andrew Mack Suggests The Irishman of To-day In an American Play

Between songs and chatter of Pat and Mike at the American Theater, Andrew Mack, the veteran Irish tenor, found time to talk of the modern Irishman and his place in the theater.

"The managers don't seem to be as keen as they used to be to produce Irish plays. But they have in mind the Irish plays of years ago which were merely vehicles for the tenor to sing songs in costume. Why not put the modern Irishman on the stage dressed as I am?" Mr. Mack was wearing a blue serge suit, a white flower decorated his buttonhole and he swung a cane. "Isn't the Irishman as much a part of this country as any other man? Don't we have him on the stage, in politics, in business, everywhere? Let us have the Irishman of to-day in an American setting, and we would have plays that would appeal.

"The Jews and the Irish used to enjoy the costume plays where the singer had the spotlight most of the evening. But the children of these peoples have moved uptown, in better sections of the city than their fathers and mothers lived in, and they need something different."

Mack then went out to tell the afternoon audience the inevitable joke about the Irishman and the Scotchman, in which the latter is invariably worsted in a friendly battle of wits.

"Jane Clegg" a Treat To Margaret Wycherly, Who Plays Title Role

MARGARET WYCHERLY is as enthusiastic over "Jane Clegg," in which she is playing the title rôle for the Theater Guild at the Garrick Theater, as are members of that organization in her performance. She is enthusiastic over the work of Dudley Digges, who plays opposite her in the part of "the absolute rotter," and over the entire casting of the play. In fact, Miss Wycherly has never done anything in which she took more genuine pleasure.

"My connection with the play and the guild came about quite by accident," she said. "I sauntered into a little tearoom and found Phil Moeller and Helen Westley. They were discussing St. John Ervine's latest work and the success that had greeted his 'John Ferguson' when the guild presented it earlier in the season.

"'Madge,' said Phil, 'would you under any circumstances appear in a play if you were not starred or even featured?'

"'Oh, I might,' I answered, not too encouragingly, 'if it were produced off of Broadway.'

"'Well, that's just what this is—just off of Broadway,' he said. Then he explained the play and the part and said that in his opinion I just was Jane. He didn't know what the others on the casting committee would think of it, but he wanted to be sure I would entertain it if they made the proposal and I liked the play and the part.

"Mr. Ervine is the most truly modest man I have met. His wife told me she had never liked Jane until she saw me play her. Every one thought her cold and hard, but she isn't. She's just the only real adult in the play. All the rest, old and young, are children and she has to treat them as such.

"Her husband, 'the absolute rotter,' is a very natural sort of weak man. He just happens to be a forger. And isn't Mr. Digges wonderful in the part? It is only the second big part he has played. 'John Ferguson' gave him his first chance. He was stage manager for George Arliss for eight years, and never had an opportunity to play anything but perfunctory bits. I think all the casting is great. Mr. Travers, as the squealing bookie, is superb. He reminds me for all the world of a beaver hound. And it's a compliment from me to liken any one to a dog. Isn't it, Billy?" Pulling the soft seal ears of her gentle spaniel, who wagged a grateful tail in confirmation.

"I have a new play coming on next fall, but I am not at liberty to tell about it."

Cheatrical Openings of the Week

MONDAY—At the Ziegfeld Roof, atop the New Amsterdam Theater, F. Ziegfeld jr. will present "The Girls of 1920," a 9 o'clock revue, produced under the stage direction of Ned Wayburn, with music and lyrics by Gene Buck and Dave Stamper. The roof has been redecorated and rearranged as a restaurant. In the company are Lillian Lorraine, Alta King, Kathleen Martyn, the Comeron sisters, Sybil Carmen, Vanda Hoff, Mary Hay, Florence Ware, Irene Barker, Jessie Reed, Fannie Brice and Princess Wah-Letka, a full-blooded Indian with "messages from the spirit world." Ben Ali Haggin will offer living presentations of great paintings by old masters.

THURSDAY—At the Punch and Judy Theater Dodge and Pogany will present a drama entitled "Musk," with Blanche Yurka. Others in the cast include Yvonne Garrick, Marguerite Rand, Leah Temple, Olga Ziceva, Natalja Black, Henry Mortimer, Cecil Owen, Douglas Garden, Scott Moore and Burnel Lunbec. "Musk" was first produced at the Royal Court Theater in Vienna a year before the European war. Vadim Uraneff, who was associated with Stanislawsky in the Moscow Art Theater and with Meyerhold at the Imperial Theater in Petrograd, has staged the production.

Ince Offers Columbia Students $2,000 Apiece For Scenarios Taken

THOMAS H. INCE offers a prize of $2,000 to any Columbia University student writing a photoplay suitable to his needs. This does not mean that he will pay that sum for the best story submitted to him, but the amount will be the reward received by as many of the students as create purchasable material.

In addressing the cinema composition class and the students in short story writing and dramatic construction last week Mr. Ince touched upon various angles of writing for the screen.

"Of course, an uneventful sequence of humdrum incidents does not constitute a story merely because the characters and their actions have really lived and had their being. There must be intrigue, conflict, suspense and climax no matter what characters are involved or what expedients are employed. And they must be natural.

"Clean stories, too, are what the public wants. Most producers realize this. Certainly the better ones do. The day of the salacious or suggestive story has passed and writers for the screen can do no better than keep this fact before them. A story which is first of all clean and has the necessary elements of drama in it stands a far better chance of being produced than the most exciting, most cleverly constructed story which does not measure up to the moral standard of audiences.

"In fact, the idea is what counts with a producer. If your synopsis contains the fundamental of a story you can rest assured it will be bought with alacrity—if, of course, it meets the needs of the producer to whom it is submitted. Study the screen. Learn what the various companies are doing; watch the star you have in mind for the story and you will profit."

The rewards of writing for the screen afforded Mr. Ince the opportunity to make his listeners gasp. He cited the instance of C. Gardner Sullivan, who has been with him six years. Formerly a New York newspaper man, he attracted Mr. Ince's attention with his Indian-Western stories in the early days of motion pictures. His work was bought regularly by Mr. Ince for the small sum prevailing at the time until the need of his constant services brought about an offer from Mr. Ince of his expenses to California and $50 weekly. Since then Mr. Sullivan has written scores of photoplays and is regarded by Mr. Ince as the most imaginative and prolific screen specialist. He receives $150,000 yearly now, said Mr. Ince, and holds an interest in his stories as well.

Philip Moeller's Motto In Writing His Plays Is "Sans Esprit, Rien"

By Philip Mindil

IN AS fascinating a studio as can be found in all Greenwich Village sat Philip Moeller, author of "Sophie," the new play in which Emily Stevens is starring at the Village Theater, surrounded by his alluring library. Thousands of rare volumes filled two sides of the room, one side being almost entirely devoted to the drama in many languages.

"How do you manage to dig up so many scintillant lines for your plays and where?" he was asked.

"I don't. If they are bright I am glad, but they come without an effort. I never labored with a play, and I don't think I ever shall. All fine work—and I don't say for a moment mine is, but I try to make it so—must have the spirit of spontaneity and enthusiasm. My motto is 'Sans Esprit, Rien' (Without Spirit, Nothing), and I hope if any one cares to chisel on my tombstone he will hew there those three words.'

"Where did you get it?"

"I made it up."

Recalling that all of Mr. Moeller's plays were of a different time and place than our own, he was asked why he did not write a modern American play, and revealed the news that he is now engaged on his first at the order of David Belasco.

"The creation of character, in which I delight," he said, "has nothing to do with period or place. I have chosen mine for the beauty of the background."

Besides "Sophie" Mr. Moeller has written "Molière," in which Henry Miller and Blanche Bates were seen; "Mme. Sand" for Mrs. Fiske and "Helena's Husbands," concerning Helen of Troy.

"I love the Renaissance vertu," he said.

"Are you French, then?"

"No, a New Yorker through three generations."

"And your forebears?"

"I am a Jew, of German and English descent. But I have a French tendency in my work. I have knocked about in odd corners of Europe a great deal, and I adore France, her history, her characters, her atmosphere, her settings."

His plays have all been comedies, but he admitted that his present ambition is to write something serious for the Theater Guild, of which he is one of the founders. He was also one of those who started the Washington Square Players, and his first playwriting consisted of one-act pieces, notably "The Roadhouse in Arden" for that organization. He has only been writing for the stage four or five years.

"I staged many of their plays for the Square Players," he said; "my own, Andreyev's and Maeterlinck's."

"Do you think a playwright should produce his own plays to get the best results?"

"Yes, if he has had experience in producing and finds that he can. I like it tremendously. A playwright learns his profession that way as in no other."

"Have you taken the playwrighting courses?"

"Yes, all of them, but one learns the theater in the theater, not in a college lecture hall. Producing his own plays would be a bad thing for an author who is not willing to listen to criticism of his work and to be grateful for it. He must be willing to cut, and cut freely. It is so much better to write more than you need and cut in rehearsal than not to write enough and then have to pad to fill out an evening's entertainment."

Mr. Moeller admitted that he is thirty-nine and a bachelor. He was educated in the New York public schools and at Columbia University. When he came to think seriously about a career he studied the theory of music and tried its composition, but gave it up for the more congenial work of writing plays.

"What were you doing so many years poking into the out-of-the-way places of Europe?"

"I was collecting knowledge of humanity, if that doesn't sound too large, but in the last five years since I started to write plays I haven't thought about a vacation. I get all my pleasure in the theater."

"You haven't written many plays; does it take you a long time?"

"No, not the actual writing. I think about a play for a long time and gather my material from the people around me. This reacts quickly on my imaginary characters once I get really started."

"Do you consider 'Sophie' a detriment to public morals?"

"Not at all!" he laughed. "'Sophie' must not be taken too seriously. I don't mean to say I haven't been sincere, but one can't be witty in a Sunday school. I think salaciousness is a bad investment, and no amount of fame or money would induce me to write anything deliberately unclean. 'Sophie' is sophisticated, but she is natural."

Quilloquon Pays Pretty Tribute to His Children In "George Washington"

"If you have a daughter of your own, a sister, or a niece, aged not more than ten or twelve, you have seen her take her mother's skirt, hat and fur piece, put them on, go to the mirror and strike attitudes. She criticizes herself; she adjusts her 'make-up'; she is satisfied. When young children get together they don't, as do their elders, play bridge, talk politics, the sugar shortage, or anything else of equal interest. They wander off into the realm of make-believe; they act.

"When we go to study poise or to look for it, we go to a group of children. They are continually play-acting, enacting scenes they have seen. They play with so much truth, their observations are so keen, they are so content with their interpretations that they convince."

George Marion, Quilloquon, the ballad singer, in "George Washington" at the Lyric Theater, is speaking. His kindly eyes sparkle with happiness when he talks of children, and the little boy, Fred J. Verdi, and the little girl, Phyllis Loughton, cuddle up to him, listening to his songs and stories throughout the play. Sympathy, kindliness, love of children, he says, are to be found in almost every actor. Looking at him, it is easy to believe this.

"Children are playing themselves usually on the stage. The older actor is often called upon to do something totally foreign to himself. But actors are really grown-up children and it is only experience and cultivation that put leashes around us and make it more and more difficult for us to revert to what we were.

"The two children in 'George Washington' are exuberant, interesting, delightful to work with. They know the whole play, and at rehearsals any slip in lines or action was noted by them almost instantly. They are intent on their work, they are enjoying it, and the actors are stimulated by their freshness and sweetness. Perhaps it is because the play is so near to the things that they have been studying in school in their histories that it intrigues their interest as much as it does.

"Fred and Phyllis catch the spirit of the material where it seems to be symbolical," says Mr. Marion. "They are appreciative, and this is of great assistance in getting the songs and stories over."